



Controlling Cancer in Texas

By U.S. Sen. John Cornyn

Good news on a subject that often can mean bad news came this month from the American Cancer Society. The downward trend of cancer-related deaths first reported in 2003 continued in 2004.

This positive news should provide hope to Texans that patients can survive cancer—especially if it is detected early.

What's more, this downward trend indicates that America's grassroots efforts to control the disease are indeed making a difference.

The news media plays a vital role. This month, Harvard University released a study—well-reported in the media—suggesting tobacco companies have increased the rate of nicotine delivered in cigarettes. Information of this nature underscores the grassroots efforts in our state, ensuring our citizens know of smoking's close link with cancer-related illness and death.

We have many resources in Texas that help educate consumers and researchers about the disease. To name just a few: the renowned M. D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, the Southwest Oncology Group in San Antonio and the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation in Dallas.

These organizations and their peers across the state have set the standard for cancer prevention, early detection, research and treatment efforts throughout the nation—and even the world.

But additional, significant efforts to educate Americans about this important issue are carried out daily by a dedicated army of less well-known professionals and volunteers. They deserve our deep gratitude.

One clearinghouse in this education campaign is the Texas Comprehensive Cancer Control Coalition, an Austin-based group that unites public, non-profit and private efforts to ensure initiatives to battle the disease are targeted, efficient and successful.

One of the coalition's primary goals is to implement the Texas Cancer Plan. This nationally recognized blueprint was developed by more than 80 cancer experts throughout the state. It aims to reduce the impact of cancer on Texans and their families.

The Plan provides professionals and educators throughout Texas with comprehensive cancer-prevention information to ensure early detection and treatment. It's the basis for many local public education efforts in Texas.

In January, many educators and volunteers have worked to promote Cervical Cancer Prevention Month. Efforts are also underway to ensure wom-

en know that cervical cancer is highly preventable through healthy behaviors, screenings and even drug therapy.

Other volunteers have partnered with media outlets to increase awareness about prevention and early detection. These education campaigns are but a few examples of efforts in Texas communities to combat the disease.

The Texas Comprehensive Cancer Control Coalition provides a helpful resource on its Web site, "Inventory of Activities," providing information on community-based cancer education efforts in Texas.

For instance, Texas A&M University System Health Science Center offers the "Spit Tobacco Prevention Network," volunteers working to eliminate spit or chewing tobacco statewide. Nicotine cessation programs are planned this year in East Texas and the Panhandle.

Volunteers from the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston manage the Cancer Nutrition Network, providing rural populations with information about the relationship between cancer prevention and nutrition.

The Cancer Resource Enhancement Program, based in Paris, Texas, raises funds for another statewide organization, the Texas Cancer Council, to help implement the Texas Cancer Plan.

And the Lance Armstrong Foundation in Austin offers one of several toll-free lines for persons who need to talk about their cancer experience. Armstrong, one of Texas's most famous cancer survivors, developed the now easily recognized yellow wristband featuring the words, "Live Strong." Countless people wear these bands in a show of solidarity against the disease.

These stories are a potent reminder about the power of individuals working together in their communities to affect change. These fine examples of volunteerism contribute every day to decreasing cancer-related deaths in Texas.

Sen. Cornyn serves on the Armed Services, Judiciary and Budget Committees. In addition, he is Vice Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Ethics. He serves as the top Republican on the Judiciary Committee's Immigration, Border Security and Citizenship subcommittee and the Armed Services Committee's Airland subcommittee. Cornyn served previously as Texas Attorney General, Texas Supreme Court Justice and Bexar County District Judge. For Sen. Cornyn's previous Texas Times columns: www.cornyn.senate.gov/column